

# Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

---

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession

Week 5 - Article IV



---

## Review/Summary:

The Augsburg Confession is the specific Lutheran confession of the Christian faith which we believe, teach, and confess in our churches according to God's Holy Word. It was written by Philip Melanchthon in consultation with Luther and others and presented to the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530 AD. The aim of the confession was to present as fully as possible the doctrinal articles of the Orthodox Christian faith, as taught in Scripture and the "Church catholic" (universal). Rome had charged Luther and "the Lutherans" of teaching heresy. The Lutherans presented their case before Emperor Charles V, and the confession was accepted making it "legal" to be Lutheran Christians because our teachings did not dissent from the Orthodox Christian teaching of Scripture.

It consists of 28 articles of which the first 21 deal with the "chief articles of faith"— most following the model of Thesis-Antithesis. That is each states the belief we hold and then states the false beliefs which are condemned (as heresy). The last 7 articles are the abuses which had been corrected by the Lutherans, showing why Rome was actually guilty of heresy and justifying the changes made by the Lutherans with regard to customs and ceremonies.

Article I: Of God— This article proceeds from the creeds (especially the Nicene council) and teaches that there are three persons in the God-head who are of the same essence and power and who are co-eternal.

Article II: Of Original Sin— All men are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence (desire for sin); and this disease, or vice of origin is truly sin.

Article III: Of The Son of God— Christ Jesus, true God and true man, suffered and died to reconcile the Father unto us and be a sacrifice for all sins of men. He sends the Holy Spirit.

## Article IV Justification

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. <sup>2</sup> People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. <sup>3</sup> God counts [reckons] this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21–26; 4:5]).

Note: There is a historic saying in Lutheranism that the Church stands or falls on the article of justification. To justify means “to declare righteous.” God’s sure and certain declaration that we are righteous in His eyes is possible only because of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Through His life, Jesus satisfied God’s demand for perfect obedience. Through His sacrificial death, Jesus took God’s wrath and atoned for the sins of the world. The Holy Spirit, through the means of grace, works in us saving faith, which personally apprehends what Christ has done for us. Our justification before God, therefore, is brought about by the One who lived, suffered, and died for our salvation. We cannot merit God’s favor through our obedience; we cannot offer sacrifices to pay for our sins. But what we cannot do for ourselves, Christ has done for us. He is the solid Rock on which God builds His Church. On Him, and Him alone, we stand forgiven. (See also Ap IV; SA III XIII; FC Ep III and SD III.)

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (pp. 32–33). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

### **Outline of the Article:**

#### IV. Justification

- A. We cannot obtain forgiveness by our own merits. (1-2)
- B. We receive forgiveness of sin by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith. (2)
- C. This faith is counted as righteousness. (3)

### **“What’s it all about?” by Rev. Dr. J.A.O. Preus III**

Sooner or later, any honest seeker into Christianity will ask this question. This is perhaps the most important question any pastor or lay person gets asked by those inquiring into the faith: “What’s it all about? What’s at the heart of this faith called ‘Christian’?”

Questions like these are on the minds of many people today, people who are seeking the inner meanings of life and existence, of God and humanity. “What’s it all about?” It’s all about this: [Justification].

Here is the heart of this faith called Christian. This is what it centers around, what it hangs upon. This is what makes it all make sense: We are declared to be right in God’s eyes, not because of our own works or merits, but solely because of God’s gracious favor towards us, on account of Christ, which we receive through faith alone.

The words “before God” should not escape our attention. What Christianity is “all about,” before it is about anything else, is addressing our deepest, most fundamental problem. The doctrine of justification addresses the “problem of God,” the “Problem that *is* God.”

*The “God-Problem”:* As sinners, our most pressing problem is the problem of the God who demands perfection, perfect righteousness. That we are not perfect, that we cannot live perfect lives, because of our sin, is a real problem—not for God of course, but for us, since God, who is perfectly just, is angry because of our sin and punishes it. Justification is the solution to the “God-Problem.” Christianity stands for a lot, indeed. It stands for personal and psychological wholeness. It stands for fairness and justice. It stands for peace and the promotion of a godly life. It stands for the poor and the widows and the downtrodden. But before it is any of these things, it is about the proclamation of the Good News that God Himself has, solely by His grace in Christ, apart from our works, solved our most serious problem: God Himself!

All is right with God! What a beautiful doctrine! This gives Christ all the glory for His wonderful work of saving sinners; but it also gives us, sinners, the maximum amount of comfort possible. Apart from our works, by grace, on account of Christ, through faith—these are the four “component parts” of what is known as the “doctrine of justification.” Right here is the heart and core of what “we believe, teach and confess.”

Theology, in a way, consists in answering two simple questions. First, “what?” What does the Word of God say? What is the doctrine of justification?... But we have not finished our task until we have answered the second question: “So what?” So, what does it mean? What are the implications of the doctrine of justification? Literally, it means everything to us. Having been declared by the Gospel to be righteous before God, there opens up to us a whole new reality, a reality lived through faith in Christ.

**Terms Defined:**

*Justification*— “to be declared righteous in the sight of God.” It is the same as forgiveness of sins.

A forensic (legal) term related to the idea of acquittal. Justification refers to the divine act whereby God makes humans, who are sinful and therefore worthy of condemnation, acceptable before God, who is holy and righteous.

*Righteousness*— to be just or right. Perfect conformity to the Law of God, perfect sinlessness

*Remission*— forgiveness, the declaration of righteousness/justification

*Merit*— something earned

*Work*— any act of will, thought, word, or deed

*Satisfactions*— works that appease the wrath of God or fulfill the requirements of His anger against sin

*Faith*— trust in Christ and God’s mercy

*Grace*— the favor of God

*Will*— the impulse or desire of a person, that which leads to a person’s decisions

**Questions:**

Read 1 Timothy 1:15. *What is Christianity all about?*

Read Romans 3:21-26.

*What is our “problem”?*

*Why can man not justify himself before God?*

*Where does the act of justification take place?*

Read Romans 4:1-25.

*What place did justification have in the Old Testament?*

*What is justification by faith?*

*How do we know we are justified?*

Read Romans 5:1-11.

*How does justification by faith give peace with God?*

The “So What”... *A man (or woman) comes to the pastor in great distress, because he is suffering from an illness and he is troubled because he feels God is punishing Him for something. How does the pastor minister to him?*

*Likewise a man (or woman) comes to the pastor in distress, because he has committed a sin which he does not believe that God will forgive him. How does the pastor minister to this man?*

*What is the importance of including this Article of faith—what we believe, teach, and confess about justification—in the Augsburg Confession?*

*(ie. Why is this the article upon which the Church stands or falls?)*

### **Scripture Passages Cited:**

1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup>The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Romans 3:21–26 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup>It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 4:1–25 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup>And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;

<sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup>How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup>and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

<sup>13</sup>For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

<sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup>That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup>No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup>But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup>but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup>who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Romans 5:1–11 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup>More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.